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ABSTRACT

The study examined graduate and professional school receptivity to nontraditional student applicants by reviewing what institutions know about nontraditional education, what institutional attitudes and practices are regarding nontraditional education, and what institutions actually do in admissions procedures that permit access to nontraditional students. Questionnaires were mailed to 496 chairpersons of graduate departments of English, Sociology, Psychology, Medicine, Law, Secondary Education, Business Administration, and Chemistry of 61 U.S. institutions with 60 percent return. Findings indicate that graduate departments were somewhat knowledgeable regarding nontraditional concepts but much less knowledgeable regarding specific programs where such concepts are put into practice, and that departments varied in levels of openness, with attitudes somewhat favorable to nontraditional education but much less favorable toward admission of nontraditional students to their departments. Possible correlates of openness in institutions were developed and reviewed. (Author)

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IMPLICATIONS FOR NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION: GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL RECEPTIVITY TO NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT APPLICANTS

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IMPLICATIONS FOR NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION: GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL RECEPTIVITY TO NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT APPLICANTS[1]

Given the rapid development of nontraditional undergraduate programs in the last decade and the difficulties many students and admissions committees report in the handling and review of nontraditional applications, the study examined graduate and professional school receptivity to nontraditional student applicants by reviewing three major aspects of an institution's "mindset" to nontraditional education: (1) what institutions know about nontraditional education, (2) what institutional attitudes and practices are regarding nontraditional education, and (3) what institutions actually do in their admission procedures that permit access to nontraditional students. The descriptors of these issues were defined in the study as: knowledge base, attitudes/practices, and procedures. A fourth descriptor included the background characteristics of an institution.

Related Research

Research relevant to the study was reviewed in the following areas: (1) the role of graduate and professional schools in reforms of higher education, (2) the limitations of using grades as good indicators of graduate school and/or adult success, and (3) the previous record of institutions in accepting nontraditional students into their programs, both at undergraduate and graduate levels.

The literature indicates that graduate institutions have been slow to accept changes in undergraduate reforms, and the threat this creates for nontraditional programs searching for legitimacy as graduates of nontraditional programs seek mobility through the higher education system (Curtis, 1972; Gaff et al, 1970; Kimmel, 1970; Cross and Valley, 1974; Mayhew, 1965; Brown, 1973; Heiss, 1973). The review indicates the extent to which graduate institutions rely upon grades and standardized tests during their admissions procedures and the difficulties this poses for nontraditional applicants who frequently do not have grades (Levine and Weingart, 1973; Russell, 1965).

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[1]This paper is based upon a dissertation presented to the University of Minnesota, Department of Educational Administration, in July 1976.

The literature indicates findings that do not support the use of grades as good predictors of school success (Hoyt, 1966; Humphreys, 1968; Levine and Weingart, 1973), and therefore, sheds considerable skepticism on the prevailing emphasis on grades by graduate institutions.

The literature also indicates general trends of nonacceptance by graduate institutions of nontraditional transcripts (AACRAO, 1971; the University of California at Santa Cruz, 1970 and 1974; Heininger, 1972; Schoemer, Thomas, and Bragonier, 1971; Hassler, 1969; Stevens, 1973). Since most of the studies completed utilized pass-fail transcripts as examples of nontraditional transcripts, the data gathered, though not entirely useful to nontraditional programs using more radical options such as narrative transcripts, nevertheless, indicate that such institutions would be even more closed to nontraditional students who possessed narrative transcripts than to those with pass-fail transcripts. The general climate for acceptance of nontraditional student applicants by graduate institutions was that graduate institutions were not supportive of nontraditional trends and practices.

It was the purpose of this study, therefore, to assess any changes in this general view, and to further explore possible differences in openness to nontraditional education from institution to institution, as a way of clarifying this problem and shedding light on what might make a graduate department "more open" to nontraditional student applicants than another graduate department.

Study Design

The study was designed to examine the general climate for acceptance of nontraditional education and nontraditional student applicants to graduate level departments around the country. It was anticipated that graduate departments would vary in their knowledge of nontraditional concepts and programs, and exemplify various levels of openness to nontraditional education and nontraditional student applicants. The study, therefore, determined the dependent variables to be the level of openness of graduate departments and the knowledge level of graduate departments. Openness was further delineated into four factors: attitudinal openness, practice openness, options openness, and miscellaneous/procedures openness.

The study also designated a number of independent variables which were thought to have possible bearing upon a department's openness and knowledge level related to nontraditional education. Independent variables included:

- Type of school
- Degree level offered
- Academic field
- Selectivity standards
- Accreditation region
- Recruiting characteristics
- Proximity to nontraditional undergraduate program
- Financial incentive for an interest in nontraditional education
- Educational philosophy of department
- Prior experience with nontraditional student(s)
- Prior experience with nontraditional transcript(s)
- Growth level of department
- Policy regarding nontraditional applicants
- Title of respondent
- Years in respondent's position
- Respondent length at institution
- Respondent admission committee participation
- Knowledge level
- Size of department
- Application to acceptance ratio

Department chairpersons of graduate departments of English, Sociology, Psychology, Medicine, Law, Secondary Education, Business Administration, and Chemistry of the 61 largest and most prestigious institutions around the country were selected as the sample for the study on the assumption that: (1) these graduate institutions set the standards followed by other graduate institutions (Cartter, 1966; Heiss, 1970), and (2) departments rather than graduate schools, i.e., department chairpersons rather than deans, would exemplify a diversity in dealing with student applicants.

Instrument Development and Administration

The study was of the survey descriptive type: the self-reported perceptions of department chairpersons regarding their knowledge of nontraditional education concepts and programs, attitudes to nontraditional education and student applicants, general demographic backgrounds, and practices as related to nontraditional applicants formed the data base for the study. Because a large number of departments from around the country (N=498) were included in the study, a mailed questionnaire was utilized.

Two pilot tests were carried out prior to the development of the final survey instrument. Reliability and validity procedures were conducted on the pilot-test instrument using test/retest method for the former, and face and content validity (expert panel review) for the latter.

Mailed questionnaires were subsequently sent out on printed fixed-format instruments to the sample group (N=498) in the Fall of 1975. Usable returns from the mailed survey were received from 60% of the sample, although a smaller percentage is reflected in the data analysis N due to the respondents who chose to submit qualitative comments rather than utilize the fixed-format items on the questionnaire.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research questions which formed the base of the study were as follows: (1) What do departments know about nontraditional education concepts and programs? (2) What are departmental attitudes toward and practices regarding nontraditional student applicants and nontraditional education? (3) What do departments actually do in their admissions processes that permit access to nontraditional students? (4) How much experience have departments actually had in dealing with nontraditional student applicants? (5) Can an openness score be created which documents the extent to which departments are more open/less open to nontraditional education and nontraditional student applicants?

Hypotheses which were tested in the study were as follows:

#1 There is a significant correlation between a department's openness in attitude, openness to nontraditional options, and openness in admissions practices; i.e., an openness score can be derived using the factor analytic approach which includes the various aspects of attitude, options, and practice as significantly correlated factors.

#2 There is no expected difference between a graduate department's openness, as measured by either multiple measures of openness and/or a composite openness score, and a department's: (a) type, (b) academic field, (c) selectivity standards, (d) region, (e) recruitment level, (f) proximity to nontraditional program, (g) financial incentive, (h) application/acceptance ratio; (i) educational philosophy; (j) prior experience with nontraditional

student, (k) prior experience with nontraditional transcript, (l) growth of department, (m) policy, (n) title of respondent, (o) years in position, (p) length at institution, (q) age of respondent, (r) admission committee participation, (s) size, and (t) knowledge level.

#3 There is no expected difference between a graduate department's knowledge of nontraditional education and a department's: (a) type, (b) academic field, (c) selectivity standards, (d) region, (e) recruitment level, (f) proximity to nontraditional program, (g) financial incentive, (h) application/acceptance ratio, (i) educational philosophy, (j) prior experience with nontraditional student, (k) prior experience with nontraditional transcript, (l) growth of department, (m) policy, (n) title of respondent, (o) years in position, (p) length at institution, (q) age of respondent, (r) admission committee participation, and (s) size.

Data Analysis

Data were subjected to statistical analyses using basic descriptive statistics, Pearson-product moment correlations, factor analysis, and one-way analysis of variance tests for significant differences. Significance levels were set at the .05 level.

Findings

A profile of the educational, experiential, and general background of the respondents was developed to provide an understanding of the study group and to provide data used as independent variables. A summary of the descriptive findings includes:

(1) A majority of graduate departments were from public institutions (61% public, 37% private).

(2) A majority of graduate departments offered as their highest degree the PhD (76%), with only 5% the M.A./M.S. The remaining offered the professional degree of J.D. or M.D. (19%).

(3) Respondents were fairly equally represented among academic fields, with English, Chemistry, Sociology, and Secondary Education each at 13%; Psychology at 15%; Business Administration at 11%; and Medicine and Law at approximately 9% each.

(4) A majority of respondents rated their graduate departments as either highly selective in admission standards (40%) or very selective (34%). Only 3% were minimally selective.

(5) A majority of respondents indicated application to acceptance rates from 1-26%, with 30% of the departments in the 27-51% range. Only 11% indicated an acceptance rate of from 71-98%.

(6) A majority of respondents were from departments of enrollment sizes from 4-200 (57%). Only 9% were from departments enrolling 900+ students.

(7) Respondents were represented by accreditation region as follows: West (8%), Northwest (2%), South (27%), Middle States (20%), North Central (37%), and Northeast (6%).

(8) A majority of respondents characterized their level of recruitment activities as active or moderate (53%), with only 12% of respondents conducting no recruitment of students.

(9) A majority of respondents were not close in proximity to an undergraduate nontraditional program (51%), although a fairly large number of respondents indicated they were (40%).

(10) A majority of respondents had not received any special resources/financial incentives for any interest in nontraditional education (62%), although 22% indicated they had.

(11) A majority of respondents rated their educational philosophy within their departments to be either traditional (46%) or midway between traditional and open (40%). Only 14% felt their departments were open in educational philosophy.

(12) Nearly half of the respondents (49%) had admitted a graduate of a nontraditional undergraduate program to their departments, whereas 32% did not know if they had, and 19% had not.

(13) Over half of the respondents (55%) had received an admissions application which included a narrative transcript, whereas nearly one-third had not (31%).

A summary of the research question findings includes:

(1) Respondents' knowledge level of nontraditional education concepts and programs ranged from scores of 0-79 (high score = high knowledge), with a majority of respondents scoring in the 41-60 range (55%). Respondents were more knowledgeable about general trends in education, such as serving new populations, the educational needs of older adult learners, the reasons for the rise of nontraditional higher education in the U.S.; but were not as knowledgeable about the newer methods for actually providing educational opportunities for such groups, i.e., student-designed degree programs, the use of

community faculty, non-credit based degree programs, external degree programs, cooperative education programs, competency-based education programs. Respondents were generally much less knowledgeable regarding specific model programs of nontraditional education, such as New York Regents External Degree Program, Empire State College, the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, British Open University, and University Without Walls.

(2) Respondents' attitudes toward and practices regarding nontraditional education and nontraditional student applicants are summarized as follows:

(a) A majority of respondents believed nontraditional programs are an important part of the higher education system (60%).

(b) A slight majority favored future growth of nontraditional programs (52%).

(c) A majority felt that students with nontraditional transcripts experienced difficulties in applying to graduate institutions in the U.S. (74%).

(d) A majority felt that students with nontraditional transcripts experienced difficulties in applying to their own departments (55%).

(e) A majority felt that nontraditional student applicants would be treated with more skepticism by their admission committee than traditional student applicants (66%).

(f) A majority wanted to standardize transcript information to their department along traditional lines (56%).

(g) A majority felt that traditional transcripts were adequate ways of representing a student's learning in college to their department (63%).

(h) A little more than one-third felt that narrative transcripts were adequate ways of representing a student's learning in college to their department.

(i) A majority believed that nontraditional education significantly differs from traditional education at the higher education level (73%).

(j) A substantial majority believed it acceptable to use qualified persons working in the community as adjunct faculty for undergraduate students involved in learning activities outside the classroom (83%).

(k) A majority viewed the prospect of receiving more applicants from nontraditional programs positively (59%).

(l) Slightly over half felt that graduates of nontraditional programs do as well as graduate level work as graduates of traditional programs (53%).

(m) A majority felt that students should take the majority of coursework in the classroom in order to cover the kind of material which prepares them for an undergraduate major acceptable to their department (72%).

(n) A minority felt that students could take the majority of coursework outside the classroom in order to cover the type of material which prepares them for an undergraduate major acceptable to their department (15%).

(o) A majority recognized credits given to students for various types of learning frequently associated with nontraditional programs:

- supervised internships (82%)
- independent reading projects (91%)
- field experiences (75%)
- independent research projects (95%)
- study abroad (82%)
- credit by examination, as in CLEP (79%)
- credit by committee evaluation of skills acquired prior to entry to program (60%)

(p) A substantial majority of respondents felt that students with credits in several of the above categories, without substantial credits in in-classroom study, would be treated with more skepticism than traditional student applicants (85%).

(3) A minority of respondents actually had a policy they follow concerning evaluation of nontraditional transcripts (19%). It was assumed that the remainder of respondents followed a diverse number of procedures in dealing with nontraditional student applications. In order to examine some of these procedures, the study compared the differences in ratings given to various admissions criteria for traditional student and nontraditional student applicants.

Admission criteria were rated by respondents in importance as follows:

Rating of Admission Criteria for Traditional Students: Very Important to Essential

Admission Criteria	Very Important/ Essential
Traditional Transcript	92%
Interview	29%

GRE	78%
Advanced GRE	45%
Miller Analogy Test	22%
Professional Tests	70%
Faculty Reference Letters	80%
Samples of Prior Work	36%
Descriptions of Work Experience	42%
Descriptions of Life Experience	28%
Work Supervisor Reference Letter	45%
College Grade Point Average (GPA)	88%
Reputation of College	73%
College Class Rank	51%
Description of Extra-curricular Activities	24%
Narrative Transcript	28%

For each of the admission criteria frequently submitted by nontraditional student applicants, respondents rerated the criteria as follows:

Rating of Admission Criteria for Nontraditional Students: Very Important/Essential

Admission Criteria	Very Important/ Essential
Narrative Transcript	74%
Standardized Test Scores Appropriate to Field	91%
Faculty Reference Letter	90%
Work Supervisor Reference Letter	64%
Descriptions of Work Experience	52%
Descriptions of Life Expeience	32%

In every case, admissions criteria for nontraditional students were rated as more important than they were when simply listed as part of other admission criteria in the first table. It can be inferred from these differences that nontraditional students will be treated differently than traditional students: that standardized test scores, reference letters, and other such criteria will be far more important for nontraditional students, and that it is very likely that nontraditional students will suffer because of such discriminatory and "special" practices.

Further evidence of discriminatory practice was found in questions which asked respondents what they would accept in place of standard

admission criteria such as the traditional transcript, college GPA, reputation of college, college class rank, and learning certified by numbers of credits -- items which many nontraditional students would be unlikely to be able to submit to admission committees. Respondents were to indicate "no exemption" if their departments would allow no exemption for the various criteria cited above.

For traditional transcripts, 20% indicated "no exemption;" for college GPA, 19% indicated "no exemption;" for reputation of college, 14% indicated "no exemption;" for college class rank, 5% indicated "no exemption;" and for learning certified by numbers of credits, 15% indicated "no exemption."

Therefore, for four out of the five admission criteria, 15-20% of the respondents indicated no exemptions were available to nontraditional students; which means that nontraditional applicants could not be considered for admission to these departments.

When asked what likely criteria could be submitted in place of the five above-mentioned criteria, respondents put an emphasis upon standardized test scores, reference letters from faculty, narrative transcripts, and combinations of those and several other factors. The indication from these findings is that nontraditional students would have a difficult time competing with other applicants because they would have to be "superior" to other students in order to make up for a lack of traditional admission criteria. For the superior nontraditional student applicant, this finding may not be a significant one; for the above average and average student, this finding has serious implications.

The tendency for graduate departments to feel that superior students would manage to do well competitively, but the above average and average students would suffer because their standardized test scores and reference letters would not be exceptional, is expressed in the following respondents' quotes:

> Law School Respondent
>
> We compile an index for each applicant which includes the student's GPA, rank in class, and reputation of his college. We, therefore, cannot compute an index for a nontraditional student. If a nontraditional stu-

dent has strong evaluations and high LSAT scores, his file is sent to the Admission Committee. However, such a student is still at a disadvantage, since our 'traditional faculty' tend to favor grades over evaluations or LSAT scores.

Law School Respondent

As a practical matter, a nontraditional degree forces the Committee to place more weight on the LSAT. While ideally it perhaps should not be this way, the Committee simply will not take the time to look far beyond the traditional transcript.

Law School Respondent

I cannot feel that a student who would approach our Admission Committee with a nontraditional undergraduate education and transcript would be given serious consideration. I do not forsee any changes in our traditional admission practices in the future.

An additional problem for nontraditional students is that even if they can compete with traditional students for "places" in an incoming graduate level class, they cannot compete for financial awards. While some respondents indicated they would consider admitting nontraditional students for probationary admission, they would not consider them for financial aid. A chemistry department reported:

> The type of student you are concerned with would be very difficult to evaluate, and certainly would never be offered financial aid since we have many traditional applicants whose backgrounds we can evaluate.

Although there were a number of respondents who indicated they would consider nontraditional student applicants, the general feeling of respondents seems best summarized by the following respondent's comment:

> By and large, I think that a student from a nontraditional undergraduate background is at a serious disadvantage in a traditional gradaute program.

(4) Nearly one-half of the respondents had some experience in dealing with nontraditional student applicants because 49% of them had admitted a graduate of a nontraditional undergraduate progrmm, and 55% had received an admission application which included a narrative transcript. A fairly

large number of respondents knew that their institutions also housed an undergraduate nontraditional program (39%), so it can be assumed that many were somewhat familiar with nontraditional programs.

(5) A composite openness score was devised which portrayed the extent to which graduate departments were more open and/or less open to nontraditional education and nontraditional student applicants. The openness score was derived by a factor analysis of variables which were each descriptors of some facet of openness to nontraditional education and nontraditional student applicants. Three factors were delineated from a factor analysis of 22 variables, and are defined as: attitudinal openness, practice openness, and options openness. A fourth factor, miscellaneous/procedures openness was an openness measure not included in the factor analysis but utilized as an openness measure because it addressed itself to discriminatory practices of departments in dealing with nontraditional student applicants.

The composite openness score was, therefore, comprised of attitudinal, practice, options, and procedures openness. Score ranges for openness measures were as follows:

Openness Measures

Openness Measure	Min.	Max.	Mean
Practice Openness	7	22	16.022
Options Openness	1	28	20.737
Attitudinal Openness	0	24	13.588
Procedures Openness	-2	7	2.633
Composite Openness	22	83	52.980

A summaryof hypotheses findings appears below. Planned contrasts were not carried out on analysis of variance tests: directions of significance reported in the following summaries were based upon highest versus lowest mean scores for each variable of interest:

#1 Hypothesis #1 was accepted based on factor analysis intercorrelations between factors 1-3 (attitude, practice, and options) for N of 230 and correlations significant at .131 (significant at the .05 level).

#2 Hypothesis #2 (b), (e), (f), (g), (j), and (t) were rejected at the .05 level of significance based on one-way analysis of variance tests. The following list summarizes the direction of significant differences for composite openness score:

(b) Academic fields of Law and Chemistry were least open. Secondary Education and Sociology were most open.

(e) Departments which were active in recruitment of students were more open than departments which conducted no recruitment.

(f) Departments which were close in proximity to nontraditional undergraduate programs were more open than those which were not.

(g) Departments which had received some financial incentive for an interest in nontraditional education were more open than those which had not.

(j) Departments which had prior experience with nontraditional student applicants were more open than those which had not.

(t) Departments which had high knowledge were more open than those with low knowledge.

Hypothesis #2 (b), (e), (g), and (t) were rejected for options openness score. The following list summarizes the direction of significant differences:

(b) Academic fields of Law, Chemistry, and Medicine were the least open in options openness, compared to Sociology, Secondary Education, and Psychology which were the most open.

(e) Departments which were active in recruitment were more open than departments which conducted no recruitment.

(g) Departments which had received some financial incentive for interest in nontraditional education were more open than those which had not.

(t) Deaartments which were high in knowledge were more open than those which were low in knowledge.

Hypothesis #2 (b), (g), (i), and (t) were rejected for practice openness score. The following list summarizes the direction of significant differences:

(b) Academic fields of Medicine, Chemistry, Psychology, and Law were the least open in practice openness, compared to fields

of Secondary Education and Sociology which were the most open.

(g) Departments which had received some financial incentive for interest in nontraditional education were more open than those which had not.

(l) Departments which were open in educational philosophy were more open in practice openness than those which were traditional in educational philosophy.

(t) Departments which were high in knowledge were more open in practice openness than those which were low in knowledge.

Hypothesis #2 (f), (g), (j), (k), (n), (q), (r), (s), and (t) were rejected for attitudinal openness score. The following list summarizes the direction of significant differences:

(f) Departments which were close in proximity to nontraditional undergraduate programs were more open in attitudinal openness than those which were not.

(g) Departments which had received some financial incentive for interest in nontraditional education were more open than those which had not.

(j) Departments which had prior experience with nontraditional students were more open than those which had not.

(k) Departments which had prior experience with nontraditional transcripts were more open than those which had not.

(n) Deans were less open than Department Chairpersons and Directors/Heads of Admissions.

(q) Older respondents were less open than younger respondents.

(r) Respondents who served on their admission committees were more open than those who did not.

(s) Departments of larger enrollment sizes were more open than smaller departments.

(t) Departments which were high in knowledge level were more open than those which were low in knowledge level.

Hypothesis #2 (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (g), (j), (k), (n), and (s) were rejected for procedures openness score. The following list summarizes the direction of significant differences:

(b) Academic fields of Business Administration and Chemistry were less open in procedures openness than departments of Medicine and Secondary Education which were more open.

(c) Departments which were highly selective in student applicants were more open than those which were fairly selective.

(d) Departments in the Southern Accreditation Region were least open compared with departments in the Northeast, Northwest, and West which were most open.

(e) Departments which did no recruitment of students were more open than those which did minimal recruitment.

(f) Departments which were close in proximity to nontraditional undergraduate programs were more open than those which were not.

(g) Departments which had received some financial incentive for interest in nontraditional education were more open than those which had not.

(j) Departments with prior experience with nontraditional students were more open than those with none.

(k) Departments with prior experience with nontraditional transcripts were more open than those with none.

(n) Deans were less open than Directors/Heads of Admissions and Chairpersons of Departments.

(s) Departments of medium enrollments were more open than departments of small size and large size.

#3 Hypothesis #3 (b), (e), (l), (m), and (o) were rejected for knowledge level. The following list summarizes the direction of significant differences:

(b) Academic fields of Secondary Education were more knowledgeable of nontraditional education than fields of Chemistry, English, Medicine, and Law, which were less knowledgeable,

(e) Departments which conducted no recruitment of students were less knowledgeable of nontraditional education than departments which conducted moderate to active recruitment.

(l) Departments experiencing substantial growth in student numbers were more knowledgeable than those experiencing loss in student numbers.

(m) Departments which had a policy for dealing with nontraditional student applicants were more knowledgeable than those which did not.

(o) Respondents who had been in their positions the longest, were more knowledgeable than those which had held theirs for only a short time.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to provide a data base where very little, if any, existed. The study described the general climate for acceptance of nontraditional education and nontraditional student applicants -- a climate which was somewhat open toward nontraditional education in general, but not very open regarding the acceptance of nontraditional student applicants to graduate departments. The study revealed that there is a fairly wide range of openness to and knowledge about nontraditional education, and that there is some relationship between what a department knows about nontraditional education and how open that department, therefore, will be to nontraditional education.

Although it was indicated that students would experience considerable difficulties in achieving admissions to graduate departments around the country, nontraditional students do have opportunities for admissions, and there are some possible predictors of openness (receptivity) in a graduate department. For example, though the results are not conclusive, it is suggested that departments of large size; departments in the Northeast, Northwest, and West regions; departments which have admitted nontraditional students previously; departments which are active in recruitment; departments which have growing enrollments, departments which are knowledgeable regarding nontraditional education; departments which have received some financial incentive for an interest in nontraditional education; departments which have devised a specific policy for dealing with nontraditional applications; academic fields of Secondary Education, Sociology, and Psychology; departments which are selective in admission criteria (and hence larger); departments which are close in geographic proximity to nontraditional programs, will be more open to nontraditional student applicants.

Some specific conclusions can be drawn from this study for three distinct interest groups: staff of nontraditional programs, students

of nontraditional programs, and staff of graduate/professional schools.

Implications of Findings for Staff of Nontraditional Programs. The study reviewed the concern staff of nontraditional undergraduate programs have for the mobility of their students through the higher education system, and the need nontraditional programs have for recognition and legitimacy of purpose. It is the obligation of staff of nontraditional programs to aid their students to achieve mobility through the educational system, as well as to provide liaision with educational units with which they come into contact.

The study found that nontraditional students will have considerable difficulties in achieving acceptance to graduate departments around the country. Staff of nontraditional programs should, therefore, be prepared to:

- Advise and counsel with students regarding the difficulties students may experience after graduation from the nontraditional program.
- Work with admission committees and faculty at graduate level institutions to educate them regarding nontraditional programs, and to determine which graduate programs will provide access to students in their locale.
- Work within their own staff to make nontraditional transcripts clear, readable, and as acceptable to graduate departments as possible (without changing the values of the nontraditional program).
- Educate both college/university and community faculty to work with graduate level departments when students are seeking admission so as to provide departments with as much useful information about the student as possible.

Staff of nontraditional programs should also be aware of the lack of research on nontraditional education methods and procedures in the literature and are encouraged to conduct research on nontraditional issues and to publish such information for the use of the educational community. This is especially important since knowledge level of nontraditional concepts and programs has been shown in this study to be a correlate of openness to nontraditional student applicants.

Implications of Findings for Students. Students who obtain their undergraduate educations through nontraditional programs are somewhat at

a disadvantage when applying to graduate level institutions in the U.S. Though it is not impossible for such students to achieve access to graduate level departments, it will be more difficult for students to receive a fair hearing of their qualifications, and to compete for financial aid awards. Students, therefore, should be prepared to present their qualifications within such a skeptical environment.

In order to improve chances for a fair review of records, students are advised to:

- Contact various graduate departments in which they are interested and ask them their policies regarding the handling of nontraditional student applications. If the department will not consider such applications, it is probably fruitless for the student to attempt to achieve admission here.

- If the department will consider nontraditional student applications, every effort should be made to ascertain what exactly the department prefers in lieu of presentation of standard admission criteria (if the student does not have "standardized" records). The student should be prepared to solicit letters of support from faculty and other persons qualified to assess qualifications for graduate level work.

- Students should attempt to interview with a representative of the Admissions Committee and discuss with that representative his/her reasons for attending a nontraditional program, and his/her reasons for seeking further education through a traditional program.

- Students should be prepared to take standardized tests appropriate to the field whether required or not, and are advised to take these tests seriously inasmuch as admission committees will very likely rely more heavily on standardized measures for nontraditional students than for traditional students.

- Students should write a statement to be included with admissions materials stating his/her reasons for seeking an undergraduate education which was nontraditional, and giving some indication of his/her commitment to and abilities to function in a traditional program.

- Students should be aware that, in general, they will not be able to compete for financial awards, although they should discuss this during an interview if this is a concern of theirs.

- Students should be aware that they may be admitted on "probationary" terms, and should be encouraged to accept such

terms if they are committed to pursuing their educations through traditional graduate level programs.

. Students should also be aware that should there not be traditional graduate level programs in their field open to them, there are nontraditional graduate level programs around the country. Students are advised to investigate options such as these should they desire to continue their studies in a nontraditional program and/or receive no satisfaction in their efforts toward admission to traditional graduate programs.

Implications of Findings for Graduate/Professional Departments. The study indicates that graduate departments by and large are not very supportive of nontraditional student applicants to their programs. Nevertheless, nontraditional students have rights to access to higher education, and graduate departments are obligated to consider their applications. In order to expedite this process, it is recommended that graduate departments establish a policy for the handling of nontraditional student applications, and make this policy available to nontraditional programs located near the graduate institution, as well as to interested students who solicit such information. If departments will consider certain exemptions for nontraditional students, students should be advised of such information. If departments will consider nothing other than standard admission criteria, students should also be advised of the same. It is possible that a "no exemptions" policy is discriminatory, and that a student could contest such a policy; however, it is to the department's and student's advantage that students are made cognizant of the allowances departments are willing to consider for nontraditional students.

It is also recommended that if graduate departments receive a fair number of nontraditional applicants in the future, that they consider admitting a number of this group as a "test" group to see how well they do in their programs. This would give departments an opportunity to observe what differences, if any, are presented by students coming from nontraditional undergraduate backgrounds.

It is further recommended that graduate departments become more knowledgeable regarding innovations in undergraduate education, so that they are able to deal competently with nontraditional student applicants. It is hoped that as knowledge increases, trends in undergraduate educa-

tion will be viewed by graduate level departments as possible cues for graduate school reforms, and that efforts will be made to meet with staff of nontraditional programs which may be located near the graduate department to provide an interchange of ideas regarding the values and trends occurring within the interdependent units.

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